

# When Food Bites Back

Story by Marsha Ladner



**TWO million Americans fall victim to food poisoning each year and often never know it, assuming that their symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and severe pain are signs of stomach flu.**

Food poisoning occurs most often in the summer or on festive occasions, when meat and dairy products — including dairy and egg ingredients in pastries and sandwiches — are left unrefrigerated for long periods of time.

The symptoms of food poisoning usually occur within three to 36 hours after eating contaminated food, and the illness may last from 12 to 48 hours.

An often-fatal form of food poisoning is botulism, which is indicated by symptoms including blurred vision and difficulties in swallowing and breathing. Botulism is generally caused by improper home-canning methods.

## Prevention

◇ Don't eat meats, dressings or sauces that have been kept between 40 and 140 degrees for more than two hours.

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◇ Be especially careful with large cooked meals such as holiday turkeys, which require a long time to cool. Some parts of the meat may stay over 40 degrees long enough to produce bacterial growth.

◇ Use a thermometer to check your refrigerator setting. The temperature should be between 34 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

◇ Defrost meats in the refrigerator or in the microwave, not at room temperature.

◇ Reheat meats to over 140 degrees for more than 10 minutes to destroy bacteria before serving.

◇ Put party foods on ice to keep them cool.

◇ Keep raw vegetables away from meat juices.

◇ Discard cans or jars that have bulging lids or leaks.

◇ Wash your hands, food-preparation surfaces and utensils frequently.

◇ Do not use wooden cutting boards.

◇ Cover meats and poultry during microwave cooking to heat the surface of the meat.

◇ Follow home canning and freezing instructions to the letter. Call your county Agricultural Extension Service office for advice about home-canning.

◇ When you eat out, avoid rare or uncooked meats, and eat salad bar and deli items immediately.

## At-home Treatment for Food Poisoning

◇ Limit water intake until after vomiting has stopped — rehydrate with ice chips or small sips of water.

◇ Drink only clear, noncarbonated liquids for 24 hours after symptoms occur.

◇ Gradually progress to such easily digestible foods as dry toast and applesauce.

◇ Avoid spicy foods for 48 hours after all symptoms have gone.

◇ Check with others who may have eaten the same foods.

◇ If possible, save a sample of suspect food for analysis in case symptoms do not improve.

*Wash your hands often with soap and water to avoid the spread of bacteria.*

## When to Seek Medical Help

◇ If the victim cannot control vomiting after 12 hours of ice-chips-only treatment.

◇ If a fever persists or respiration rate is 24 times per minute or greater.

◇ If the victim, especially a young child or elderly adult, appears very ill.

If you suspect food poisoning from a canned product or have any of the symptoms of botulism poisoning, seek help immediately. Take suspect food with you if you still have it. □

